

AN APPEAL

TO THE
RELIGION, JUSTICE, AND HUMANITY
OF
THE INHABITANTS
OF THE
BRITISH EMPIRE,
IN BEHALF OF THE
NEGRO SLAVES IN THE WEST INDIES.

BY

WM WILBERFORCE, ESQ., M.P. 175

Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work.

JEREMIAH.

Do justice and love mercy.

MICAH.

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AN

A P P E A L,

&c. &c.

TO all the inhabitants of the British Empire, who value the favour of God, or are alive to the interests or honour of their country,—to all who have any respect for justice, or any feelings of humanity, I would solemnly address myself. I call upon them, as they shall hereafter answer, in the great day of account, for the use they shall have made of any power or influence with which Providence may have entrusted them, to employ their best endeavours, by all lawful and constitutional means, to mitigate, and, as soon as it may be safely done, to terminate the Negro Slavery of the British Colonies; a system of the grossest injustice, of the most heathenish irreligion and immorality, of the most unprecedented degradation, and unrelenting cruelty.

At any time, and under any circumstances, from such a heavy load of guilt as this oppression amounts to, it would be our interest no less than our duty to absolve ourselves. But I will not attempt to conceal, that the present embarrassments and distress of our country—a distress, indeed, in which the West Indians themselves have largely participated—powerfully enforce on me the urgency of the obligation under which we lie, to commence, without delay, the preparatory measures for putting an end to a national crime of the deepest moral malignity.

The long continuance of this system, like that of its parent the Slave Trade, can only be accounted for by the generally prevailing ignorance of its real nature, and of its great and numerous evils. Some of the abuses which it

involves have indeed been drawn into notice : but when the public attention has been attracted to this subject, it has been unadvisedly turned to particular instances of cruelty, rather than to the system in general, and to those essential and incurable vices which will invariably exist wherever the power of man over man is unlimited. Even at this day, few of our countrymen, comparatively speaking, are at all apprised of the real condition of the bulk of the Negro population ; and, perhaps, many of our non-resident West-Indian proprietors are fully as ignorant of it as other men. Often, indeed, the most humane of the number, (many of them are men whose humanity is unquestionable,) are least of all aware of it, from estimating, not unnaturally, the actual state of the case, by the benevolence of their own well meant, but unavailing, directions to their managers in the western hemisphere.

The persuasion, that it is to the public ignorance of the actual evils of West-Indian Slavery that we can alone ascribe its having been suffered so long to remain unreformed, and almost unnoticed, is strongly confirmed by referring to what passed when the question for abolishing the Slave Trade was seriously debated in 1792. For then, on the general ground merely of the incurable injustice and acknowledged evils of slavery, aggravated, doubtless, by the consideration that it was a slavery forcibly imposed on unoffending men for our advantage, many of the most strenuous and most formidable opponents of the immediate abolition of the Slave Trade charged us with gross inconsistency, in not fairly following up our own arguments, and proposing the gradual extinction also of Slavery itself. " If," they argued, " it is contrary, as you maintain, to the soundest principles of justice, no less than to the clearest dictates of humanity, to permit the seizure, and transportation across the Atlantic, of innocent men to labour for our benefit, can it be more just, or less inhuman, to leave the victims of our rapacity to a life of slavery and degradation, as the hopeless lot of themselves and their descendants for ever? If, indeed, it had been true, as was alleged by the African mer-

chants, that the slaves were only the convicts of Africa, condemned after a fair trial, or that they were delivered by the mercy of their British purchasers from becoming the victims of a bloody superstition, or of a relentless despotism, or of cruel intestine wars,—in short, if, as was urged in defence of the traffic, the situation of the slaves in Africa was so bad that it was worth while, even on the plainest principles of humanity, to bring them away, and to place them in a Christian community, though at the price of all the sufferings they must undergo during the process of their deliverance, yet even then our detaining them as slaves longer than should be necessary for civilizing them, and enabling them to maintain themselves by their own industry, would be indefensible. But when, as we maintained, all these pleas had been proved to be not merely gross falsehoods, but a cruel mockery of the wretched sufferers, how much more strongly were we bound not to desert them so soon as they should be landed in the West Indies, but to provide as early as possible for their deliverance from a bondage which we ourselves declared to have been originally unjust and cruel ! But whatever shadow of a plea might have existed for reducing the imported Africans to slavery, surely none could be urged for retaining, in the same hopeless state, their progeny to the latest generation.”

Such was, I repeat it, the reasoning of many of our greatest and ablest opponents, as well as of some of our warmest friends. Such, more especially, was the argument of our most powerful antagonist in the House of Commons ; and, on these grounds, he, thirty years ago, proposed, that in less than eight years, which of course would have expired at the beginning of the present century, not only should the Slave Trade cease, but the extinction of slavery should itself commence. —He proposed, that from that hour every new-born Negro infant should be free ; subject only, when he should attain to puberty, to a species of apprenticeship for a few years, to repay the owner for the expense of maintaining him during the period of infancy and boyhood. Can I here forbear remarking, that if the

advocates for immediate abolition could have foreseen that the feelings of the House of Commons, then apparently so warmly excited, and so resolutely fixed on the instant extinction of the Slave Trade, would so soon subside into a long and melancholy apathy ; and had they in consequence acceded to these proposals, the Slavery of the West Indies would by this time nearly have expired, and we should be now rejoicing in the delightful change which the mass of our Negro population would have experienced, from a state of ignominious bondage to the condition of a free and happy peasantry.

And by whom was this proposal made ? Was it by some hot-headed enthusiast, some speculative votary of the rights of man ? No : by the late Lord Melville, then Mr. Dundas, a statesman of many great and rare endowments, of a vigorous intellect, and superior energy of mind ; but to whom no one ever imputed an extravagant zeal for speculative rights or modern theories. And let it be taken into account in what character he suggested this measure. In that which seemed to give a pledge not only for its justice but for its expediency ;—that of the partizan and acknowledged patron of the West-Indian body ; and at the very moment when he was most conversant with all their affairs, and naturally most alive to all their interests. If any emotions of surprise, therefore, should be excited by my present Appeal, it should be, that it has been so long delayed, rather than that it is now brought forward ; that, previously to our commencing our endeavours for the mitigation and ultimate extinction of slavery, we should have suffered twenty-two long years to elapse, beyond that interval for notice and preparation, which even the advocate of the West Indians himself had voluntarily proposed, as what appeared to him at once safe and reasonable.

It is due also to the character of the late Mr. Burke to state, that long before the subject of the Slave Trade had engaged the public attention, his large and sagacious mind, though far from being fully informed of the particulars of the West-Indian system, had become sensible of its deeply

criminal nature. He had even devised a plan for ameliorating, and by degrees putting an end both to the Slave Trade and to the state of slavery itself in the West Indies. He proposed, by education, and, above all, by religious instruction, to prepare the poor degraded slaves for the enjoyment of civil rights; taking them, in the meantime, into the guardianship and superintendence of officers to be appointed by the British Government. It scarcely needs be remarked, in how great a degree Mr. Burke was an enemy to all speculative theories; and his authority will at least absolve those who now undertake the cause of the Negro Slaves, from the imputation of harshly and unwarrantably disturbing a wholesome and legitimate system of civil subordination.

But if such were the just convictions produced in the mind of Mr. Burke, though very imperfectly acquainted with the vices of the West-India system—still more, if it was conceded by many of those who opposed the immediate abolition of the Slave Trade, more especially by that politic statesman, Mr. Dundas, that a state of slavery, considered merely as a violation of the natural rights of human beings, being unjust in its origin, must be unwarrantable in its continuance—what would have been the sentiments and feelings produced in all generous and humane minds by our West-Indian Slavery, had they known the detail of its great and manifold evils?

The importance of proving, that the alleged decrease of the slaves arose from causes which it was in the master's power easily to remove, led the Abolitionists of the Slave Trade, in stating the actual vices of the West-Indian system, to dwell much, and too exclusively, perhaps, on the slaves being under-fed and over-worked, and on the want of due medical care and medical comforts. These evils, which are indeed very great, must, of course, be aggravated where the planters were in embarrassed circumstances, notoriously the situation of the greater part of the owners of West-Indian estates. But, speaking generally, there exists essentially in the system itself, from various

causes, a natural tendency towards the maximum of labour, and the minimum of food and other comforts. That such was the case in general, whatever exceptions there might be in particular instances, was decisively established by the testimony even of West-Indian authorities; and it was fatally confirmed by the decrease of the slaves in almost all our settlements. No other satisfactory explanation could be given of this melancholy fact; for it is contrary to universal experience as to the Negro race, not in their own country only, where they are remarkably prolific, but in the case of the domestic slaves, even in our Sugar Colonies. The free Negroes and Mulattoes, and also the Maroons*, in the island of Jamaica, the Charaibst† of St. Vincent, and the Negroes of Bencoolen, were all known to increase their numbers, though under circumstances far from favourable to population; and, above all, a striking contrast was found in the rapid native increase of the Negro Slaves in the United States of America, though situated in a climate far less suited to the Negro constitution than that of the West Indies. There alone, in a climate much the same as that of Africa, it was declared impossible even to keep up their numbers, without continual importations. This fact alone was a strong presumptive proof, and was raised by various concurrent facts and arguments into a positive certainty, that the decrease of the slaves arose in no small degree, not only from an excess of labour, but from the want of a requisite supply of food, and of other necessities and comforts. The same phenomena, I fear, are still found to exist, and to indicate the continuance of the same causes. For unless I am much misinformed, there is still a progressive decrease by mortality in most of our Colonies; and if in a smaller ratio to their

* The descendants of the Negro Slaves who fled into the woods, when Jamaica was taken by Venables and Vernon, under Oliver Cromwell, and who, about eighty years ago, were settled in separate villages as free Negroes.

† The descendants of the crew of an African ship which was wrecked on the island about a century ago.

whole population than formerly, it is to be remembered that the enormous loss, in the seasoning of newly imported Africans, now no longer aggravates the sad account.

But though the evils which have been already enumerated are of no small amount, in estimating the physical sufferings of human beings, especially of the lower rank, yet, to a Christian eye, they shrink almost into insignificance when compared with the moral evils that remain behind—with that, above all, which runs through the whole of the various cruel circumstances of the Negro Slave's condition, and is at once the effect of his wrongs and sufferings, their bitter aggravation, and the pretext for their continuance,—his extreme degradation in the intellectual and moral scale of being, and in the estimation of his White oppressors.

The proofs of the extreme degradation of the slaves, in the latter sense, are innumerable; and indeed it must be confessed, that in the minds of Europeans in general, more especially in vulgar minds, whether vulgar from the want of education, or morally vulgar, (a more inwrought and less curable vulgarity,) the personal peculiarities of the Negro race could scarcely fail, by diminishing sympathy, to produce impressions, not merely of contempt, but even of disgust and aversion. But how strongly are these impressions sure to be confirmed and augmented, when to all the effects of bodily distinctions are superadded all those arising from the want of civilization and knowledge, and still more, all the hateful vices that slavery never fails to engender or to aggravate. Such, in truth, must naturally be the effect of these powerful causes, that even the most ingeniously constructed system which humanity and policy combined could have devised, would in vain have endeavoured to counteract them: how much more powerfully then must they operate, especially in low and uneducated minds, when the whole system abounds with institutions and practices which tend to confirm and strengthen their efficiency, and to give to a contemptuous aversion for the Negro race the sanction of manners and of law.

It were well if the consequences of these impressions were only to be discovered among the inferior ranks of the privileged class, or only to be found in the opinions and conduct of individuals. But in the earlier laws of our colonies they are expressed in the language of insult, and in characters of blood. And too many of these laws still remain unrepealed, to permit the belief that the same odious spirit of legislation no longer exists, or to relieve the injured objects of them from their degrading influence. The slaves were systematically depressed below the level of human beings*. And though I confess, that it is of less concern to a slave, under what laws he lives, than what is the character of his master, yet if the laws had extended to them favour and protection instead of degradation, this would have tended to raise them in the social scale, and, operating insensibly on the public mind, might, by degrees, have softened the extreme rigour of their bondage. Such, however, had been the contrary effects of an opposite process, on the estimation of the Negro race, before the ever-to-be-honoured Granville Sharpe, and his followers, had begun to vindicate their claim to the character and privileges of human nature, that a writer of the highest authority on all West-India subjects, Mr. Long, in his celebrated *History of Jamaica*, though pointing out some of the particulars of their ill treatment, scrupled not to state it as his opinion, that in the gradations of being, Negroes were little elevated above the orang outang, "that type of man." Nor was this an unguarded or a hastily thrown-out assertion. He institutes a laborious comparison of the Negro race with that species of baboon; and declares, that, "lu-

* An act of Barbadoes (8th Aug. 1688,) prescribing the mode of trial of slaves, recites, that "they being brutish slaves, deserve not, for the baseness of their condition, to be tried by the legal trial of twelve men of their peers, &c." Another clause of the same act, speaks of the "barbarous, wild, and savage natures of the same Negroes and other slaves," being such as renders them wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, practices, and customs of other nations. Other instances of a like spirit might be cited in the acts of other colonies.

dicrous as the opinion may seem, he does not think that an oran outang husband would be any dishonour to a Hot-tentot female." When we find such sentiments as these to have been unblushingly avowed by an author of the highest estimation among the West-India colonists, we are prepared for what we find to have been, and, I grieve to say, still continues to be, the practical effects of these opinions.

The first particular of subsisting legal oppression that I shall notice, and which is at once a decisive proof of the degradation of the Negro race, in the eyes of the Whites, and a powerful cause of its continuance, is of a deeply rooted character, and often productive of the most cruel effects. In the contemplation of law they are not persons, but mere chattels; and as such are liable to be seized and sold by creditors and by executors, in payment of their owner's debts; and this separately from the estates on which they are settled. By the operation of this system, the most meritorious slave who may have accumulated a little peculium, and may be living with his family in some tolerable comfort, who by long and faithful services may have endeared himself to his proprietor or manager—who, in short, is in circumstances that mitigate greatly the evils of his condition—is liable at once to be torn for ever from his home, his family, and his friends, and to be sent to serve a new master, perhaps in another island, for the rest of his life.

Another particular of their degradation by law, which, in its effects, most perniciously affects their whole civil condition, and of which their inadequate legal protection is a sure and necessary consequence, is their evidence being inadmissible against any free person. The effect of this cannot be stated more clearly or compendiously than in the memorable evidence of a gentleman eminently distinguished for the candour with which he gave to the Slave-Trade Committee the result of his long personal experience in the West Indies,—the late Mr. Otley, Chief-justice of St. Vincent's, himself a planter:—"As the evidence of

Slaves is never admitted against White men, the difficulty of legally establishing the facts is so great, that White men are in a manner put beyond the reach of the law." It is due also to the late Sir William Young, long one of the most active opponents of the abolition, to state, that he likewise, when Governor of Tobago, acknowledged, as a radical defect in the administration of justice, that the law of evidence "covered the most guilty European with impunity."

The same concession was made by both houses of the legislature of Grenada, in the earliest inquiries of the Privy Council. The only difficulty, as they stated, that had been found in putting an effectual stop to gross and wanton cruelty towards slaves, was that of bringing home the proof of the fact against the delinquent by satisfactory evidence, those who were capable of the guilt, being in general artful enough to prevent any but slaves being witnesses of the fact. "As the matter stands," they add, "though we hope the instances in this island are at this day not frequent, yet it must be admitted with regret, that the persons prosecuted, and who certainly were guilty, have escaped for want of legal proof."

It is obvious that the same cause must produce the same effect in all our other slave colonies, although there has not been found the same candour in confessing it.

The next evil which I shall specify, for which the extreme degradation of these poor beings, in the eyes of their masters, can alone account, is the driving system. Not being supposed capable of being governed like other human beings, by the hope of reward, or the fear of punishment, they are subjected to the immediate impulse or present terror of the whip, and are driven at their work like brute animals. Lower than this it is scarcely possible for man to be depressed by man. If such treatment does not find him vile and despised, it must infallibly make him so. Let it not however be supposed, that the only evil of this truly odious system is its outraging the moral character of the human species, or its farther degrading the

slaves in the eyes of all who are in authority over them, and thereby extinguishing that sympathy which would be their best protection. The whip is itself a dreadful instrument of punishment; and the mode of inflicting that punishment shockingly indecent and degrading. The drivers themselves, commonly, or rather always slaves, are usually the strongest and stoutest of the Negroes; and though they are forbidden to give more than a few lashes at a time, as the immediate chastisement of faults committed at their work, yet the power over the slaves which they thus possess unavoidably invests them with a truly formidable tyranny, the consequences of which, to the unfortunate subjects of it, are often in the highest degree oppressive and pernicious. No one who reflects on the subject can be at a loss to anticipate one odious use which is too commonly made of this despotism, in extorting, from the fears of the young females who are subject to it, compliances with the licentious desires of the drivers, which they might otherwise have refused from attachment to another, if not from moral feelings and restraints. It is idle and insulting to talk of improving the condition of these poor beings, as rational and moral agents, while they are treated in a manner which precludes self-government, and annihilates all human motives but such as we impose on a maniac, or on a hardened and incorrigible convict.

Another abuse, which shews, like the rest, the extreme degradation of the Negro race, and the apathy which it creates in their masters, is the cruel, and, at least in the case of the female sex, highly indecent punishments inflicted in public, and in the face of day, often in the presence of the gang, or of the whole assembled population of an estate. From their low and ignominious condition it doubtless proceeds, that they are in some degree regarded as below the necessity of observing towards others the proper decencies of life, or of having those decencies observed by others towards them.

It is no doubt also chiefly owing to their not being yet

raised out of that extreme depth in which they are sunk, so much below the level of the human species, that no attempts have been made to introduce among them the Christian institution of marriage, that blessed union which the Almighty himself established as a fundamental law at the creation of man, to be as it were the well-spring of all the charities of life—the source of all domestic comfort and social improvement—the moral cement of civilized society.

In truth, so far have the masters been from attempting to establish marriage generally among their slaves, that even the idea of its introduction among them never seems to have seriously suggested itself to their minds. In the commencement of the long contest concerning the abolition of the Slave Trade, it was one of a number of questions respecting the treatment of slaves in the West Indies put by the Privy Council, “What is the practice respecting the marriage of Negro Slaves, and what are the regulations concerning it?” In all instances, and from every colony, the answers returned were such as these: “They do not marry.” “They cohabit by mutual consent,” &c. “If by marriage is meant a regular contract and union of one man with one woman, enforced by positive institutions, no such practice exists among the slaves, and they are left entirely free in this respect,” &c.

Let me not be supposed ignorant of some acts of the West-Indian Legislatures, the perusal of which might produce an opposite impression on the uninformed and credulous, as they gravely require all owners, managers, &c. of slaves, under a penalty, to *exhort* their slaves to receive the ceremony of marriage as instituted under the forms of the Christian religion: they even profess “*to protect the domestic and connubial happiness of slaves.*” But, in direct contradiction to the impression that would naturally be produced by these laws, the Privy Council, but a year after their enactment, was informed, in express terms, that in the very island in which these laws had been passed, there was no such thing as marriage, except that sometimes

it existed among the Roman-Catholic Slaves. This neglect of marriage is the more extraordinary, because the owners of slaves are powerfully called on by self-interest, no less than by religion and humanity, to make the attempt to promote it. With one concurrent voice they have spoken of the licentiousness of the slaves, and of the numerous bad consequences which follow from the promiscuous intercourse so generally prevalent between the sexes. To this cause, indeed, they chiefly ascribed that inability to keep up the numbers of their slaves which they credibly professed to lament most deeply. How strange, then, that the very institution with which the Almighty associated the primeval command, "Increase and multiply," seems not even to have presented itself to their minds. I have scarcely found a solitary instance in which the want of marriage is regretted, or specified as in any degree instrumental in preventing the natural increase of slaves, which was desired so earnestly. I recollect not a word having been seriously stated on the subject, until long after the charge of neglecting the marriage institution had been strongly urged against the slave-owners by the Abolitionists. Then, indeed, it was stated in the Meliorating Act of the Leeward Islands of 1798, that it was unnecessary, and even improper, to enforce the celebration of any religious rites among the slaves, in order to sanctify contracts, the faithful performance of which could be looked for only by a regular improvement in religion, morality, and civilization. To those who know any thing of the public mind in our West-Indian Colonies, this passage speaks very intelligible language. It plainly intimates the very position I have been laying down, that the slaves are considered as too degraded to be proper subjects for the marriage institution. A striking corroboration of this position was afforded but a few years ago, when a very worthy clergyman, in one of our Leeward Islands, having obtained the master's leave, proposed to solemnize the marriage of a slave according to the forms of the Church of England. The publication of the banns produced an

universal ferment in the colony: the case was immediately referred to the highest legal authorities upon the spot; nor was the question as a point of law settled until it had been referred to his Majesty's legal advisers in this country.

I have dwelt the longer, and insisted the more strongly on the universal want of the marriage institution among the slaves, because, among the multiplied abuses of the West-Indian system, it appears to me to be one of the most influential in its immoral and degrading effects. It should, however, be remarked, that though the prevalence of promiscuous intercourse between the male and female slaves is nearly universal, yet mutual and exclusive, though rarely permanent, attachments between two individuals of different sexes frequently take place; and as the Africans notoriously have warm affections, the regard is often very strong, so long as it continues. On the mother's side also the instincts of nature are too sure not to produce great affection for her children, some degree of which also will often be found in the father. But how far are these precarious connections from producing that growing attachment, that mutual confidence, which spring from an identity of interest, from the common feeling for a common progeny, with all the multiplied emotions of hope and even of fear, of joys and even of sorrows, which bind families together, when mutually attached to each other by the indissoluble bonds of a Christian union? Alas! the injustice with which these poor creatures are treated accompanies them throughout the whole of their progress; and even the cordial drops which a gracious Providence has elsewhere poured into the cup of poverty and labour, are to them vitiated and embittered.

It must also be observed, that licentiousness thus produced is not confined to the Negroes. The fact is perfectly notorious, that it has been the general policy to employ, instead of married managers and overseers, single young men, as the immediate superintendents of the gangs; and hence it too naturally follows, that they who, from their

being the depositories of the master's authority, ought to be the protectors of the purity of the young females, too often become their corrupters.

It is a farther important truth, pregnant with the most serious consequences, that the extreme degradation which is supposed to render the slaves unfit to form the marriage contract, belongs not merely to their situation as slaves, but to their colour as Negroes. Hence it adheres not only to those who are for ever released from slavery, but to those also who, by having one European parent, might be presumed to be raised highly above the level of the servile race. Such is the incurable infamy inherent in what still belongs to them of African origin, that they are at an almost immeasurable distance in the scale of being below the lowest of the Whites*. The free Women of Colour

* The extreme degradation of the coloured race, as it affects their marriage relations, is strikingly illustrated by a passage in one of the many pamphlets published against the Registry Bill, in 1816, by a gentleman some time resident in Barbadoes. He speaks with real humanity of the Free Coloured People, and strongly recommends their being invested with civil and political rights. Such is the uncommon enlargement of his mind, that he even suggests a plan, through the medium of a moral union of the sexes among the Coloured People in the Colonies, for the gradual emancipation of the slaves; yet he very strongly deprecates any attempt to introduce any such connection between them and the White inhabitants: and he owns that the West-Indian prejudice is sufficiently implanted in his own mind, to render such a connection not only repugnant to his feelings, but "contrary to his idea of morals, religion, and polity." Observe here, that this West-Indian prejudice is only against a *moral* union and connection; for he actually informs us, that the *immoral* connection with this degraded class of the female population is almost universal, prevailing, with scarcely an exception, among the married no less than the unmarried men. He states, and it is abundantly confirmed by Mr. Edwards, that prostitution is unhappily now the only portion of the Coloured women; and that the White men who form connections with them purchase them of their owners, and in many instances of their own parents. But against the *moral* union he declares that he would guard, by advising that the laws should be made to attach the *heaviest pains and penalties of a felonious act* upon the parties so intermarrying. The opinion of a single individual, however respectable, would scarcely have sufficient weight to entitle him to so much notice in any general argument concerning the treatment of the Negroes; but it becomes

deem an illicit connection with a White man more respectable than a legal union with a Coloured husband ; while the Mulatto males, as Mr. B. Edwards declares with great feeling, are unhappily in too low a state of degradation to think of matrimony. Well may he then remark, that their spirits seem to sink under the consciousness of their condition *. Thus a fatal looseness of principle and practice diffuses itself throughout the whole community. A licentious intercourse between the White men and the Coloured females was confessed by Mr. Long to be general in his day ; and Mr. B. Edwards, whose History was published so recently as 1793, while he expresses himself with great pity for the wretched victims of this dissoluteness, acknowledges that the general morals were then little, if at all improved, in this particular.

Nor let this be deemed a consideration of subordinate importance. A most sagacious observer of human nature, the late Dr. Paley, states,—“ It is a fact, however it be accounted for,” that “ the criminal commerce of the sexes corrupts and depraves the mind and moral character more than any single species of vice whatsoever.” “ These indulgences,” he adds, “ in low life, are usually the first stage in men’s progress to the most desperate villainies ; and in high life to that lamented dissoluteness of principle which manifests itself in a profligacy of public conduct, and a contempt of the obligations of religion and moral probity.” This cannot be surprising to any considerate mind. The Supreme Ordainer of all things, in his moral administration of the universe, usually renders crime, in the way of natural consequences, productive of punishment ;

of real importance when, as in this instance, an advocate for the West-Indian cause bears his testimony to the generally prevailing sentiments and practices in one of the largest and most ancient of our West-Indian colonies.

* Can I forbear adding, that Mr. Edwards states, that to the Negroes these poor degraded Mulattoes are objects of envy and hatred, for the supposed superiority of their condition? How low then must the former be sunk in the scale of being !

and it surely was to be expected that he would manifest, by some strong judicial sanction, his condemnation of practices which are at war with the marriage institution,—the great expedient for maintaining the moral order and social happiness of mankind.

In my estimate of things, however, and I trust in that of the bulk of my countrymen, though many of the physical evils of our colonial slavery are cruel, and odious, and pernicious, the almost universal destitution of religious and moral instruction among the slaves is the most serious of all the vices of the West-Indian system ; and had there been no other, this alone would have most powerfully enforced on my conscience the obligation of publicly declaring my decided conviction, that it is the duty of the legislature of this country to interpose for the mitigation and future termination of a state in which the ruin of the moral man, if I may so express myself, has been one of the sad consequences of his bondage.

It cannot be denied; I repeat, that the slaves, more especially the great body of the field Negroes, are practically strangers to the multiplied blessings of the Christian Revelation.

What a consideration is this ! A nation, which, besides the invaluable benefit of an unequalled degree of true civil liberty, has been favoured with an unprecedented measure of religious light, with its long train of attendant blessings, has been for two centuries detaining in a state of slavery, beyond example rigorous, and, in some particulars, worse than Pagan darkness and depravity, hundreds of thousands of their fellow-creatures, originally torn from their native land by fraud and violence. Generation after generation have thus been pining away ; and in this same condition of ignorance and degradation they still, for the most part, remain. This I am well aware is an awful charge ; but it undeniably is too well founded, and scarcely admits of any exception beyond what has been effected by those excellent, though too commonly traduced and persecuted, men, the Christian Missionaries. They have done all that it

has been possible for them to do ; and, through the Divine blessing, they have indeed done much, especially in the towns, and among the household slaves, considering the many and great obstacles with which they have had to contend.

I must not be supposed ignorant that of late years various colonial laws have been passed, professedly with a view to the promoting of religion among the slaves : but they are all, I fear, worse than nullities. In truth, the solicitude which they express for the personal protection, and still more for the moral interests, of the slaves, contrasted with the apparent forgetfulness of those interests which so generally follows in the same community, might have appeared inexplicable, but for the frank declaration of the Governor of one of the West-Indian islands, which stood among the foremost in passing one of these boasted laws for ameliorating the condition of the slaves. That law contained clauses which, with all due solemnity, and with penalties for the non-observance of its injunctions, prescribed the religious instruction of the slaves ; and the promoting of the marriage institution among them ; and in order “ to secure as far as possible the good treatment of the slaves, and to ascertain the cause of their decrease, if any,” it required certificates of the slaves’ increase and decrease to be annually delivered on oath, under a penalty of 50*l.* currency. His Majesty’s Government, some time after, very meritoriously wishing for information as to the state of the slaves, applied to the Governor for some of the intelligence which this act was to provide. To this application the Governor, the late Sir George Prevost, replied as follows : “ The Act of the Legislature, entitled ‘ An Act for the Encouragement, Protection, and better Government of Slaves,’ appears to have been considered, from the day it was passed until this hour, as a political measure to avert the interference of the mother country in the management of slaves.” The same account of the motives by which the legislatures of other West-Indian islands were induced to pass acts for ameliorating the condition of the Slaves, was

given by several of the witnesses who were examined in the committee of the House of Commons in 1790 and 1791.

In all that I state concerning the religious interests of the slaves, as well as in every other instance, I must be understood to speak only of the *general* practice. There are, I know, resident in this country, individual owners of slaves, and some, as I believe, even in the colonies, who have been sincerely desirous that their slaves should enjoy the blessings of Christianity: though often, I lament to say, where they have desired it, their pious endeavours have been of little or no avail;—so hard is it, especially for absent proprietors, to stem the tide of popular feeling and practice, which sets strongly in every colony against the religious instruction of slaves;—so hard also, I must add, is it to reconcile the necessary means of such instruction with the harsh duties and harsher discipline to which these poor beings are subjected. The gift even of the rest of the Sabbath is more than the established œconomics of a sugar plantation permit even the most independent planter to confer, while the law tacitly sanctions its being wholly withheld from them.

Generally speaking, throughout the whole of our West-Indian islands, the field slaves, or common labourers, instead of being encouraged or even permitted to devote the Sunday to religious purposes, are employed either in working their provision-grounds for their own and their families' subsistence, or are attending, often carrying heavy loads to, the Sunday markets, which frequently, in Jamaica, are from ten to fifteen miles distant from their abodes.

These abuses confessedly continue to prevail in despite of the urgent remonstrances, for more than the last half century, of members of the colonial body; and these sometimes, like Mr. B. Edwards, the most accredited advocates for the interests and character of the West Indians.

The insensibility of the planters, even to the temporal

good effects of Christianity on their slaves, is the more surprising, because, besides their having been powerfully enforced by self-interest, as I have already stated, in restraining a licentious intercourse between the sexes, they were strongly recommended, especially in the great island of Jamaica, by another consideration of a very peculiar nature. The Jamaica planters long imputed the most injurious effects on the health and even the lives of their slaves, to the African practice of Obeah, or witchcraft. The agents for Jamaica declared to the Privy Council, in 1788, that they " ascribed a very considerable portion of the annual mortality among the Negroes in that island to that fascinating mischief." I know that of late, ashamed of being supposed to have punished witchcraft with such severity, it has been alleged, that the professors of Obeah used to prepare and administer poison to the subjects of their spells : but any one who will only examine the laws of Jamaica against these practices, or read the evidence of the agents, will see plainly that this was not the view that was taken of the proceedings of the Obeahmen, but that they were considered as impostors, who preyed on their ignorant countrymen by a pretended intercourse with evil spirits, or by some other pretences to supernatural powers. The idea of rooting out any form of pagan superstition by severity of punishment, especially in wholly uninstructed minds, like that of extirpating Christianity by the fire and the faggot, has long been exploded among the well-informed ; and it has even been established, that the devilish engine of persecution recoils back on its employers, and disseminates the very principles it would suppress. Surely then it might have been expected, that, if from no other motive, yet for the purpose of rooting a pagan superstition out of the minds of the slaves, the aid of Christianity would have been called in, as the safest species of knowledge : and it was strange if the Jamaica gentlemen were ignorant of the indubitable fact, that Christianity never failed to chase away these vain terrors of darkness and Paganism.

No sooner did a Negro become a Christian, than the Obeah-man despaired of bringing him into subjection. And it is well worthy of remark, that when in the outset of our abolition proceedings, his Majesty's Privy Council, among a number of queries sent out to the different West-India islands, concerning the condition of the slaves, had proposed several concerning the nature and effects of this African superstition, of which the Privy Council had heard so much from the agents for Jamaica, the Council and Assembly of the island of Antigua, in which, through the successful labours of the Moravian and Methodist missionaries, great numbers of the slaves had become Christians, resented, as an imputation on their understandings, the very idea of their being supposed to have considered the practices of the Obeah-men as deserving of any serious attention. Surely then we might have expected that regard for the temporal well-being of the slaves, if not for their highest interests, would have prompted their owners to endeavour to bring them out of their present state of religious darkness into the blessed light of Christianity. But even self-interest itself appears to lose its influence, when it is to be promoted by means of introducing Christianity among the slaves.

If any thing were wanting to add the last finishing tint to the dark colouring of this gloomy picture, it would be afforded by a consideration which still remains behind. However humiliating the statement must be to that legislature which exercises its superintendency over every part of the British Empire; it is nevertheless true, that, low in point of morals as the Africans may have been in their own country, their descendants, who have never seen the continent of Africa, but who are sprung from those who for several successive generations have been resident in the Christian colonies of Great Britain, are still lower. Nay, they are universally represented as remarkable in those colonies for vices which are directly opposite to the character which has been given of the Africans by several of the most intelligent travellers who have visited the interior

of their native country. In proof of this assertion, I refer not to any delineations of the African character by what might be supposed to be partial hands. Let any one peruse the writings of authors who opposed the abolition of the Slave Trade; more especially the Travels of Mr. Parke and M. Golberry, both published since the commencement of the Slave-Trade contest. It is not unworthy of remark, that many of the Africans in their own country are raised, by not being altogether illiterate, far above the low level to which the entire want of all education depresses the field slaves in the West Indies. It is stated by Mr. Parke, who took his passage from Africa to the West Indies in a slave-ship, that of one hundred and thirty slaves which the vessel conveyed, about twenty-five of them, who, as he supposes, had been of free condition, could most of them write a little Arabic. The want, however, of this measure of literature is of small account; but compare the moral nature of the Africans, while yet living in their native land, and in all the darkness and abominations of Paganism, with the character universally given of the same Africans in our West-Indian colonies. He will find that the Negroes, who while yet in Africa were represented to be industrious, generous, eminent for truth, seldom chargeable with licentiousness, distinguished for their domestic affections, and capable at times of acts of heroic magnanimity, are described as being in the West Indies the very opposite in all particulars; selfish, indolent, deceitful, ungrateful,—and above all, in whatever respects the intercourse between the sexes, incurably licentious.

And now, without a farther or more particular delineation of the slavery of the British colonies, what a system do we behold! Is it too much to affirm, that there never was, certainly never before in a Christian country, a mass of such aggravated enormities?

That such a system should so long have been suffered to exist in any part of the British Empire will appear, to our posterity, almost incredible. It had, indeed, been less surprising, if its seat had been in regions, like those of

Hindustan, for instance, where a vast population had come into our hands in all the full-blown enormity of heathen institutions ; where the bloody superstitions, and the unnatural cruelties and immoralities of Paganism, had established themselves in entire authority, and had produced their natural effects in the depravity and moral degradation of the species ; though even in such a case as that, our excuse would hold good no longer than for the period which might be necessary for reforming the native abuses by those mild and reasonable means which alone are acknowledged to be just in principle, or practically effectual to their purpose. But that in communities formed from their very origin by a Christian people, and in colonies containing no Pagan inhabitants but those whom we ourselves have compulsorily brought into it,—inhabitants too, who, from all the circumstances of their case, had the strongest possible claims on us, both for the reparation of their wrongs, and the relief of their miseries,—such a system should have been continued for two centuries, and by a people who may, nevertheless, I trust, be affirmed to be the most moral and humane of nations, is one of those anomalies which, if it does not stagger the belief, will at least excite the astonishment of future ages.

But it may naturally, and perhaps not unfairly, be asked of the Abolitionists—You professed to be well acquainted with the state of things in the West Indies when you moved for the abolition of the Slave Trade : if you then thought the system to be at all such as you now state it to be, how could you rest contented with restricting your efforts to the abolition of the traffic in slaves, contrary, as you confess, to the wishes and even the endeavours of many friends of your great cause, and of some even of its enemies ?

It is true, that the evils of the West-Indian system had not passed unnoticed ; and we would gladly have brought forward a plan for ameliorating the condition of the Negroes, but that the effort was beyond our strength. We found the adversaries of the abolition far too numerous

and too powerful for us, and we were perfectly sure that we should greatly add to their number and vehemence by striking also at the system of slavery. But farther I will frankly confess, that we greatly deceived ourselves by expecting much more benefit to the plantation Negroes from the abolition of the Slave Trade than has actually resulted from that measure. We always relied much on its efficiency in preparing the way for a general emancipation of the slaves: for let it be remembered, that, from the very first, Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, Lord Grenville, Lord Lansdowne, Lord Grey, and all the rest of the earliest Abolitionists, declared that the extinction of slavery was our great and ultimate object; and we trusted, that by compelling the planters to depend wholly on native increase for the supply of their gangs, they would be forced to improve the condition of their slaves, to increase their food, to lessen their labour, to introduce task-work, to abolish the driving system, together with degrading and indecent punishments, to attach the slaves to the soil, and, with proper qualifications, to admit their testimony as witnesses—a necessary step to all protection by law; above all, to attend to their religious and moral improvement, and to one of the grand peculiarities of Christianity, the marriage institution. By the salutary operation of these various improvements, the slaves would have become qualified for the enjoyment of liberty; and preparation would have been made for that happy day, when the yoke should be taken off for ever, when the blessed transmutation should take place of a degraded slave population into a free and industrious peasantry*.

* It is the more necessary to state, that the views of the Abolitionists were always directed towards the extinction of slavery, after preparing the Black population for the enjoyment of it; because, from some statements which were made in the Register-bill controversy, we may expect that our opponents will renew the charge they then brought against us, that we had originally disclaimed all views of emancipating the slaves actually in the islands, confining ourselves exclusively to the prohibition of all future importations of Negroes. Our explanation is

We were too sanguine in our hopes as to the effects of the abolition in our colonies ; we judged too favourably of human nature ; we thought too well of the colonial assemblies ; we did not allow weight enough to the effects of rooted prejudice, and inveterate habits—to absentee-ship, a vice which, taken in its whole extent, is perhaps one of the most injurious of the whole system ; to the distressed finances of the planters ; and, above all, to the effects of the extreme degradation of the Negro slaves, and to the long and entire neglect of Christianity among them, with all its attendant blessings.

True it is, that from the want of effectual Register Acts, the experiment has not been fairly tried : as the abolition is in consequence known to be a law that may easily be

clear and short. Our opponents imputed to us that our real intention was, immediately, to emancipate the slave population of the Colonies : they were aware that there were many who felt themselves bound by the most urgent principles of justice and humanity, at once to put an end to a system of crimes, which was so falsely called a trade in Negroes, who yet would oppose all endeavours to emancipate the slaves without those previous and preparatory measures that would be requisite for enabling them to render the acquisition of liberty either safe for their owners or beneficial to themselves. We, in consequence, declared, that although we certainly did look forward ultimately to the emancipation of the slaves, yet that the object we were then pursuing was only the abolition of the Slave Trade, of which it was one grand recommendation, that, by stopping the further influx of uncivilized Africans, and by rendering the planters sensible that they must in future depend on the native increase for keeping up their slave population, it would tend powerfully to prepare the way for the great and happy change of slave into free labourers. Our adversaries, however, continuing artfully to confound abolition and emancipation, our efforts were often employed in distinguishing between the two, and in distinctly and fully explaining our real meaning ; nor am I conscious of any occasion, on which we disclaimed the intention of emancipation, without accompanying the disclaimer with the clear explanation that it was immediate, not ultimate emancipation, which we disclaimed. Not to mention declarations without number of our real meaning, various illustrations might be referred to of the chief speakers in those debates, which would prove that the emancipation of the slaves was the ultimate, though not the immediate, object of all those who took the lead as advocates for the abolition of the Slave Trade.

evaded. For, let it be ever borne in mind, that the ground of our persuasion was, that the absolute prohibition of all future importation of slaves into the colonies, provided means were adopted for insuring its permanent execution, would exercise a sort of moral compulsion over the minds of the planters, and even of their managers and overseers, and induce them, for the necessary end of maintaining the Black population, to adopt effectual measures for reforming the principal abuses of the system ; but it is manifest, that such compulsion could not arise from a law which they had power to elude at pleasure. I am willing, however, for my own part, to admit that this foundation-stone of our hopes may have rested on sandy ground ; for what has since passed has proved to me how little prudence and foresight can effect in opposition to the stubborn prejudices, and strong passions, and inveterate habits that prevail in our West-Indian assemblies. With one single exception in favour of the free Coloured People in Jamaica, the admission of their evidence, which, however, only placed them in the situation which they had always before occupied in most of our other islands, I know not any vice of the system that has been rooted out, any material improvement that has been adopted. Not only the abuses which had been pointed out by the Abolitionists are still existing in all their original force, but some of those reforms which had been urged on the colonial legislatures by their warmest friends and most approved advocates remain to this hour unadopted in every island. Mr. B. Edwards, for instance, nearly thirty years ago, in his History of the West Indies, recommended the introduction, wherever practicable, of the system of task-work, accompanied of course with a law for securing to the slave his little peculium. He recommended also, though with less confidence, a plan for instituting among the slaves a sort of juries for the trial of petty offences—a measure which, he added, he had heard had been tried successfully in two instances in Jamaica, and which a humane proprietor of Barbadoes, the late Mr. Steele, introduced, and for many

years maintained with great advantage on his own estate. Another measure, which, as he truly stated, was of less doubtful efficacy, was strongly enforced by him ; namely, the duty of rendering the Sabbath a day of rest and religious improvement, by suppressing the Sunday markets, which he justly declared to be a disgrace to a Christian country. But above all the rest, he pressed the reform of what he represented the greatest of all the Negro's grievances, and which he afterwards brought to the notice of the British Parliament. This was the liability of the slaves to be sold by creditors, under executions for the payment of debts. This grievance he alleged to be upheld and confirmed, though not originally created, by a British Act of Parliament, 5 Geo. II. cap. 7., which, he contended, it was necessary to repeal, in order to enable the colonial legislatures to do away with the practice altogether. He declared it to be a grievance, remorseless and tyrannical in its principle, and dreadful in its effects ; a grievance too which it could not be urged occurred but seldom. "Unhappily," he added, "it occurs every day, and, under the present system, will continue to occur, so long as men shall continue to be unfortunate. Let this statute then," said he, "be totally repealed. *Let the Negroes be attached to the land, and sold with it.*" He even arraigned the Abolitionists as eminently criminal for not having solicited the repeal of that "execrable statute," as he termed it, though of its operation and even existence, nineteen-twentieths of them perhaps were utterly ignorant. With no little pomp and circumstance did this gentleman introduce and carry through Parliament, an act for repealing the statute complained of ; and he had the cordial and unanimous support of all the Abolitionists. This measure seemed to pledge the Assemblies in the most effectual manner to follow up the principle of the repealing act, by repealing also their own laws which supported, and had in fact first introduced, the cruel practice : and this experiment on their humanity was tried, it must be admitted,

under the most favourable circumstances ; for Mr. B. Edwards's proposal of attaching the slaves to the land was strongly recommended to their adoption by the Duke of Portland, then secretary of state for the colonies, a nobleman well known to be peculiarly acceptable to them, in a circular letter to the Governors. Yet of all our colonial legislatures, then thirteen in number, not one has in any degree reformed the grievance in question, much less followed the suggestion of Mr. Edwards, by attaching the slaves to the plantations. The House of Assembly of Jamaica contemptuously declined giving any answer at all to the Governor's message upon the subject ; and the slaves are still every where subject to that "*remorseless and tyrannical grievance*," which above three-and-twenty years ago was so feelingly denounced to, and condemned by, the British Parliament.

Other mitigations of slavery have as long been recommended to the Assemblies, even by their own most respected advocates in this country ; but not one has been effectually adopted. The laws which the various legislatures have passed for such purposes, still precisely answer the description given by Mr. Burke, in his letter to Mr. Secretary Dundas, in 1792, of such colonial statutes : " I have seen," said he, after the passing of the celebrated consolidated Slave Laws of Jamaica, and of other islands, " I have seen what has been done by the West-Indian Assemblies. It is arrant trifling ;—they have done little, and what they have done is *good for nothing, for it is totally destitute of an executory principle*." Taking into consideration all the circumstances that accompanied and followed the enactment of those laws, it is difficult to suppose that they were not passed on the views stated in the memorable letter before noticed of the Governor of Dominica, and which indeed seem to have been virtually recommended to them in 1797 by the West-Indian Committee ; as the objects suggested to them by that body were " the joint purposes of opposing the plan of the

Abolitionists*," (*i. e.* the abolition of the Slave Trade,) "and establishing the character of the West-Indian body." One grand class of such laws, passed indeed at a considerably later period,—the acts of the colonial assemblies for registering the slaves, with a view to prevent illicit importation,—are shewn, by a Report of the African Institution, to be wholly and manifestly ineffectual to their purpose. But the case, in several of the islands, is still more opprobrious; new laws have been passed, which so far from even exhibiting any show of a wish to alleviate the pressure of the yoke of slavery, have rendered it more dreadfully galling, and less tolerable, because even more than before hopeless. The individual manumission of slaves by their masters, which has been provided for, with so much sound policy as well as true humanity, by the laws in force in the Spanish colonies, and has there been found productive of such happy effects; those individual manumissions which, while slavery prevailed here, the English law assiduously encouraged and promoted, have been cruelly restrained. They were long since, in one or two of our islands, subjected to discouraging regulations; but were, in most of our colonies, wholly unrestrained till within the last thirty years. Can it be conceived possible, that even since the mitigation of slavery was recommended from the throne, in consequence of addresses from Parliament, several of the colonial legislatures have for the first time imposed, and others have greatly augmented, the fines to be paid into their treasuries on the enfranchising of slaves, so that in some colonies they amount nearly to an entire prohibition? Such acts may be truly said to be more unjust in their principle, and more cruel and dangerous in their effects, than almost any other part of the dreadful code of West-Indian legislation. The laws of England, ever favourable to manumissions, progressively rooted out the curse of slavery from our native land; but

* It is, in the original, "the plan of Mr. Wilberforce." See papers of 1804. St. Vincent's, I. 7.

it is the opposite and opprobrious tendency of these colonial laws to make the barbarous institution perpetual.

I press these topics the more earnestly, because there has prevailed among many of our statesmen, of late years, a most unwarrantable and pernicious disposition to leave all that concerns the well-being of the slaves to the colonial legislatures. Surely this is a course manifestly contrary to the clearest obligations of duty. The very relation in which the Negro slaves and the members of the colonial assemblies, which consist wholly of their masters, stand towards each other, is of itself a decisive reason why the imperial Legislature ought to consider itself bound to exercise the office of an umpire, or rather of a judge between them, as constituting two parties of conflicting interests and feelings. And this, let it be remembered, not merely because, knowing the frailty of our common nature, and its disposition to abuse absolute power, we ought not to deliver the weaker party altogether into the power of the stronger ; but because in the present instance there are peculiar objections of great force, some of which have been already noticed. In truth, West Indians must be exempt from the ordinary frailties of human nature, if, living continually with those wretched beings, and witnessing their extreme degradation and consequent depravity, they could entertain for the Negroes, in an unimpaired degree, that equitable consideration and that fellow-feeling, which are due from man to man ; so as to sympathise properly with them in their sufferings and wrongs, or form a just estimate of their claims to personal rights and moral improvement.

The fact is, that though the old prejudice, that the Negroes are creatures of an inferior nature, is no longer maintained in terms, there is yet too much reason to fear that a latent impression arising from it still continues practically to operate in the colonies, and to influence the minds of those who have the government of the slaves, in estimating their physical claims, and still more those of their moral nature. The Colonists, indeed, and the Abolitionists would differ as to facts, in speaking of the sufficiency of

the slave's supply of food, and of his treatment in some other particulars. But on what other principle than that of the inferiority of the species, can it be explained, that, in estimating what is due to the Negroes, all consideration of their moral nature has been altogether left out? When it is undeniable that they have no more power of giving their testimony against any White ruffian by whom they may have been maltreated, than if they were of the brute creation; that they are worked like cattle under the whip; that they are strangers to the institution of marriage, and to all the blessed truths of Christianity; how, but from their supposed inferiority of nature, could we nevertheless be assured by the colonial legislatures, with the most unhesitating confidence, that whatever defects there might formerly have been in their treatment, they are now as well used *as can reasonably be desired*? If such be indeed their opinion, whether that opinion proceeds from the views here intimated or not, it would still suffice to show the criminality, of our committing to them the destiny of the slaves. For let it be observed, there is not in this instance any difference as to the facts of the case; nor do the colonists affirm what we deny, as to the moral degradation of the slaves. Both parties, for instance, agree that promiscuous intercourse between the sexes, and Pagan darkness, are nearly universal among them; and yet the colonists contend that the slaves are as well treated and governed as they need to be. Can then the members of the British Parliament conscientiously devolve the duty of establishing such religious and moral reforms, as I trust it must be the universal wish of every member of the empire to introduce among the Negroes, upon those, who, to say nothing of the extremity of personal degradation, consider marriage and Christianity as unworthy of their regard, in estimating the condition of their fellow-creatures?

Indeed, the West Indians, in the warmth of argument, have gone still farther, and have even distinctly told us, again and again,—and I am shocked to say that some of their partizans in this country have re-echoed the assertion,—that

these poor degraded beings, the Negro slaves, are as well or even better off than our British peasantry; a proposition so monstrous, that nothing can possibly exhibit in a stronger light the extreme force of the prejudices which must exist in the minds of its assertors. A Briton to compare the state of a West-Indian slave with that of an English freeman, and to give the former the preference! It is to imply an utter insensibility of the native feelings and moral dignity of man, no less than of the rights of Englishmen!! I will not condescend to argue this question, as I might, on the ground of comparative feeding and clothing, and lodging, and medical attendance. Are these the only claims; are these the chief privileges of a rational and immortal being? Is the consciousness of personal independence nothing? Are self-possession and self-government nothing? Is it of no account that our persons are inviolate by any private authority, and that the whip is placed only in the hands of the public executioner? Is it of no value that we have the power of pursuing the occupation and the habits of life which we prefer; that we have the prospect, or at least the hope, of improving our condition, and of rising, as we have seen others rise, from poverty and obscurity to comfort, and opulence, and distinction? Again; are all the charities of the heart, which arise out of the domestic relations, to be considered as nothing; and, I may add, all their security too among men who are free agents, and not vendible chattels, liable continually to be torn from their dearest connections, and sent into a perpetual exile? Are husband and wife, parent and child, terms of no meaning? Are willing services, or grateful returns for voluntary kindnesses, nothing? But, above all, is Christianity so little esteemed among us, that we are to account as of no value the "hope full of immortality," the light of heavenly truth, and all the consolations and supports by which religion cheers the hearts, and elevates the principles, and dignifies the conduct of multitudes of our labouring classes in this free and enlightened country? Is it nothing to be taught that all human distinctions

will soon be at an end ; that all the labours and sorrows of poverty and hardship will soon exist no more ; and to know, on the express authority of Scripture, that the lower classes, instead of being an inferior order in the creation, are even the preferable objects of the love of the Almighty ?

But such wretched sophisms as insult the understandings of mankind, are sometimes best answered by an appeal to their feelings. Let me therefore ask, is there, in the whole of the three kingdoms, a parent or a husband so sordid and insensible that any sum, which the richest West-Indian proprietor could offer him, would be deemed a compensation for his suffering his wife or his daughter to be subjected to the brutal outrage of the cart-whip—to the savage lust of the driver—to the indecent, and degrading, and merciless punishment of a West-Indian whipping ? If there were one so dead, I say not to every liberal, but to every natural feeling, as that money could purchase of him such concessions, such a wretch, and he alone, would be capable of the farther sacrifices necessary for degrading an English peasant to the condition of a West-Indian slave. He might consent to sell the liberty of his own children, and to barter away even the blessings conferred on himself by that religion which declares to him that his master, no less than himself, has a Master in heaven—a common Creator, who is no respecter of persons and in whose presence he may weekly stand on the same spiritual level with his superiors in rank, to be reminded of their common origin, common responsibility, and common day of final and irreversible account.

But I will push no farther a comparison which it is painful and humiliating to contemplate : let it however be remembered, that it is to those who have professed insensibility to this odious contrast that the destiny of the poor slaves would be committed, were we to leave them to the disposal of the colonial legislatures.

There is another consideration, which, on a moment's reflection, will appear perhaps not less decisive. The ad-

vocates for the Negroes declare without reserve, as from the first they declared, that the reforms they wish to introduce are intended, by preparing the slaves for the possession of self-government, for the purpose of gradually and safely doing away slavery altogether, and transmuting the wretched Africans into the condition of free British labourers. Now, let it never be forgotten, the West-Indian legislatures, and almost all the colonists, with one concurrent voice, declare that the emancipation of the slaves, within any period except that to which an antediluvian might have looked forward, would be their utter ruin. Shall we then devolve the duty of introducing into the West-Indian system, the moral reforms which, once effected, would render it manifestly impossible to detain the slave in his present degrading bondage, on those who plainly tell us that his being delivered from it would be productive of their utter ruin? Can they be expected to labour fairly in producing reforms, the ultimate object of which they do not merely regard as superfluous, but dread as most pernicious and destructive? Should we act thus in any parallel instance? All comparisons on this subject are weak; but suppose that, through a criminal inadvertency, we had administered some poisonous substance to a fellow-creature, who had a special claim to our protection and kindness, that we had deeply injured his constitution, and that the comfort of all his future life, or probably his life itself, should depend on his being immediately put under a course of the ablest medical treatment. Supposing also—surely, in such a case, no unnatural supposition—that we felt the deepest distress of mind from the consciousness of the wrong we had done to this poor sufferer, and were prompted, alike by conscience and feeling, to use our utmost possible endeavours to restore him to ease and health,—should we be satisfied with committing this patient into the hands of some medical practitioner, whom otherwise we might have been disposed to employ, if he were to state to us, contrary to our plain knowledge of the fact, “The man has taken no poison—his health has sustained

no injury—he is already as sound and well as he needs to be, and requires no farther medical care.” But we may put the case still more strongly ;—Supposing there were a declared opposition of interest between the patient and the same medical practitioner, and that the latter conceived that the recovery of the patient would prove fatal to his own future fortunes,—could we then, as honest and rational men, commit the case to his uncontrouled management alone ? If we did, who would not pronounce our alleged sorrow for the injury we had done, and our earnest wish to repair it, to be no better than hypocritical affectation ?

Let me not be conceived to dwell on this topic with unreasonable pertinacity. In truth, practically speaking, the fate of the Negro Slaves, so far at least as a safe and peaceable reform of the system is in question, hinges entirely on this point. Of this the colonists themselves are well aware : and, wise in their generation, they therefore take their principal stand on the ground of objecting to the interference of the imperial legislature, for the protection of the slaves ;—though this is an objection which did not even so much as present itself to the inquiring mind of Mr. Burke, when, in the year 1780, he drew up his plan for the reformation of the Negro system ; or in 1792, when he communicated it to his Majesty’s Ministers. For we cannot suppose that had it suggested itself to his mind, as an obstacle to the introduction of his plan, he would have left it quite unnoticed. Few, if any, are bold enough to claim for the assemblies an exclusive jurisdiction on these subjects as their right. They only tell us of the delicacy of parliamentary interference in such matters of internal legislation. This delicacy, however, was not felt, I repeat it, by Mr. Burke. As little was it felt by Mr. Dundas, the avowed advocate of the Colonies, when, in 1792, he brought forward his plan of emancipation. We may therefore certainly conclude, that no such objection occurred to that experienced statesman, who, as a Minister of the Crown, was called on for great circumspection, especially in regard to measures proposed by

himself, but who, like Mr. Burke, never condescended to notice any such objection to the plan which he laid before the House of Commons.

To persons not conversant with the state of things in the West Indies, it may appear plausible to say, that the assemblies and their constituents are the most competent, in point of information, to the important work of reform; and many are apt, perhaps, to be misled by a supposed analogy between the relations of master and slave in the West Indies, and those of the owner or occupier of land and his labourers in this country. But there is in fact no just analogy between them, nor are the colonial legislatures composed of such men as the West-Indian proprietors whom we are accustomed to see in this country; many of whom are personally strangers to their estates, and to the crimes and miseries of the system by which they are governed. Nor is the moral state of the Whites resident in the West Indies, less different from that of the corresponding classes of our countrymen in their native land. It has been most truly remarked by Mr. Brougham, in his able work on Colonial Policy, that the agriculture of the West Indies has always been of a nature nearly allied to commercial adventure; and the spirit of adventure, as he justly observes, is, in such circumstances, unfavourable to morals and to manners. Mr. B. means of course, as the context shews, not such commercial enterprise as belongs to the mercantile character in its proper element, but that of which man is the subject, in the gaming agricultural speculations of a sugar colony. He means, that it gives none of the proper virtues of the industrious European merchant, and still less of those steady local attachments which belong to the landed proprietor here, and make him the natural patron of the labouring class, settled on his hereditary property. "The object of a West-India resident speculator," he observes, "is not to live, but to gain; not to enjoy, but to save; not to subsist in the colonies, but to prepare for shining in the mother country." This I am well aware will be an offensive, as I am sure it is to me a

painful, topic ; but it ought not on that account to be left out of view : and any one who wishes to form a just notion of the effects of these causes will find them stated in the work above-mentioned, with the accustomed force of that very powerful writer*. Even in the French islands, where there have been always far more resident proprietors than in our own, the same causes are stated by Mr. Malouet, himself a colonist, to operate powerfully, and to produce in a considerable degree similar bad effects.

And is it to societies consisting of such elements as these, that a humane and enlightened legislature can conscientiously delegate its duties as to religious and moral reforms ; reforms too, as has been already shewn, which the colonists not only slight as frivolous, but condemn as ruinous ? Let it be farther taken into account, that the formation of laws and regulations for the slaves is not left to the uncontrouled sentiments and feelings of the more affluent, and consequently, it may be presumed, more liberal of the

* Mr. Brougham must be understood to intend to state only the tendency and general effects of the causes he has been enumerating. When individuals manifest that they are exceptions to the rule, it is so much the more to their honour. "A colony," he remarks, "composed of such adventurers, is peopled by a race of men all hastening to grow rich, and eager to acquire wealth for the gratification of avarice or voluptuousness." "The continuance of the members in this society is as short as possible." "What," they may be supposed to say to themselves, "what, though our conduct is incorrect, and our manners dissolute? we shall accommodate them to those of our European countrymen when we return." "Such, I fear, is the natural language of men in those circumstances. But their manners are affected also by other peculiarities in their situation. The want of modest female society, the general case on the plantations remote from the towns, while it brutalizes the mind and manners of men, necessarily deprives them of all the virtuous pleasures of domestic life, and frees them from those restraints which the presence of a family always imposes on the conduct of the most profligate men. The witnesses of the planter's actions are the companions of his debaucheries, or the wretched beings who tremble at his nod, while they minister to the indulgence of his brutal appetite; and impose no more check upon his excesses, than if they wanted that faculty of speech which almost alone distinguishes them from the beasts that surround them."

resident land-owners. For the colonial house of assembly, which answers to our house of commons, is chosen by the resident White proprietors at large, and must necessarily be governed in great measure by their general sentiments and feelings. Nor can it be supposed to be uninfluenced by what is here called the popular voice, but which, in the West Indies, is the voice of the White colonists only, and these too of the lower order, among whom the *esprit de corps* is peculiarly strong. These borderers on the despised coloured race are naturally the most hostile to them, and the most tenacious of those complexional privileges which constitute their own social elevation. The voice, therefore, of the populace in the West Indies, or what may be called the cry of the mob, is always adverse to the humane and liberal principles by which the slavery of the Blacks should be mitigated, and by which they should be gradually prepared for the enjoyment of freedom.

These considerations are of no trifling moment; and they may be, in some measure, illustrated by some transactions which took place not long ago in the largest, except Jamaica, and the longest settled of all our colonies, the island of Barbadoes; though there are in that colony more resident proprietors than in any other, in proportion to the whole population. The facts I here allude to may have the more weight, because they are not liable to the objection, which has been sometimes urged against the Abolitionists when they have quoted laws and transactions of an old date, that they formed an unfair test of the opinions and feelings of the present generation; for they took place so recently as the latter part of 1804.

It had long been a reproach to Barbadoes, that the murder of a slave by his owner, instead of being a capital crime, as in most of our other West-Indian colonies, was, in that colony, punishable only by a fine of 15*l*.* Lord

* The murder of another man's slave was punished more severely, the penalty being then 25*l*. to be paid to the public treasury, and double the slave's value to the owner. But to subject the criminal to any

Seaforth, the governor, therefore, himself a West-Indian proprietor, wishing to wipe off the blot, sent a message, in the common form, to the house of assembly, recommending that an act should be passed to make the murder of a slave a capital felony. There seems every reason to believe that the council, or colonial house of lords, would gladly have assented to the proposition. But, strange as it may appear to those who are unacquainted with West-Indian prejudices, notwithstanding the time and manner in which the proposition was brought forward, the house of assembly absolutely refused to make the alteration.

If the bare statement of this fact must shock every liberal mind, how much will the shock be increased, when it is known under what circumstances it was that this refusal took place! For it had happened very recently, that several most wanton and atrocious murders had been committed on slaves; and some of them accompanied with circumstances of the most horrid and disgusting barbarity. Lord Seaforth felt all the horror likely to be produced by such incidents in a generous and feeling mind. He writes thus to Lord Camden, then the Secretary of State for the Colonies:—"I inclose the Attorney-general's letter to me on the subject of the Negroes so most wantonly murdered. I am sorry to say, *several other instances of the same barbarity* have occurred, with which I have not troubled your Lordship, as I only wished to make you acquainted with the subject in general." It is due to Mr. Beccles, the Attorney-general, and to Mr. Coulthurst, the Advocate-general, to state, that they also felt and expressed themselves on the occasion just as persons in the same rank of life would have done in this country. Lord Sea-

punishment, the murder was to have been committed "of wantonness, or only of bloody mindedness, or cruel intention; and lest there should be any disposition to visit the crime too severely, it was specially enacted, that "if any Negro or other slave under punishment by his master or his order, for running away, or any other crimes or misdemeanours towards his said master, unfortunately shall suffer in life or member, which seldom happens, no persons whatsoever shall be liable to any fine therefore."

forth also thus described the official papers he transmitted as to the murders he had mentioned in some former letters :
 “ They are selected from *a great number*, among which there is not one in contradiction of the horrible facts. The truth is, that nothing has given me more trouble to get to the bottom of, than this business, *so horribly absurd are the prejudices of the people*. However, a great part of my object is answered by the alarm my interference has excited, and the attention it has called to the business. Bills are already proposed to make murder felony in both the council and the assembly ; but I fear they will be thrown out for the present in the assembly : the council are unanimous on the side of humanity *.” Lord Seaforth’s predic-

* The letter from the Attorney-general of Barbadoes to Lord Seaforth throws so much light on the popular feeling of the lower class of White men in Barbadoes, that it ought not to be suppressed, although it is a humiliating and disgusting recital :—“ Extract of a letter from the Attorney-general of Barbadoes to the Governor of the Island :—
 ‘ A Mr. ———, the manager of a plantation in the neighbourhood, had some months before purchased an African lad, who was much attached to his person, and slept in a passage contiguous to his chamber. On Sunday night there was an alarm of fire in the plantation, which induced Mr. ——— to go out hastily, and the next morning he missed the lad, who he supposed intended to follow him in the night, and had mistaken his way. He sent to his neighbours, and to Mr. C. among the rest, to inform them that his African lad had accidentally strayed from him ; that he could not speak a word of English, and that possibly he might be found breaking canes, or taking something else for his support ; in which case, he requested that they would not injure him, but return him, and he, Mr. ——— himself, would pay any damage he might have committed. A day or two after, the owner of the boy was informed, that Mr. C. and H. had killed a Negro in a neighbouring gully, and buried him there. He went to Mr. C. to inquire into the truth of the report, and intended to have the grave opened, to see whether it was his African lad. Mr. C. told him a Negro had been killed and buried there ; but assured him it was not his, for he knew him very well, and he need not be at the trouble of opening the grave. Upon this the owner went away satisfied. But receiving further information, which left no doubt upon his mind that it was his Negro, he returned, and opened the grave, and found it to be so. I was his leading counsel, and the facts stated in my brief were as follows : That C. and H. being informed that there was a Negro lurking in the gully, went armed with muskets, and took several Negro men with them. The poor African, seeing a parcel of men coming to

tion was but too fully verified;—the assembly threw out the bill, and the law against wilful murder remained in its pristine state.

attack him, was frightened: he took up a stone to defend himself, and retreated into a cleft rock, where they could not easily come at him: they then went for some trash, put it into the crevices of the rock behind him, and set it on fire: after it had burnt so as to scorch the poor fellow, he ran into a pool of water close by: they sent a Negro to bring him out, and he threw the stone at the Negro; upon which the two White men fired several times at him with the guns loaded with shot, and the Negroes pelted him with stones. He was at length dragged out of the pool in a dying condition; for he had not only received several bruises from the stones, but his breast was so pierced with the shot, that it was like a cullender. *The White savages ordered the Negroes to dig a grave; and whilst they were digging it, the poor creature made signs of begging for water, which was not given to him, but, as soon as the grave was dug, he was thrown into it and covered over; and there seems to be some doubt whether he was then quite dead.* C. and H. deny this; but the owner assured me that he could prove it by more than one witness; and I have reason to believe it to be true, because on the day of trial C. and H. did not suffer the cause to come to a hearing, but paid the penalties and the costs of suit, which it is not supposed they would have done had they been innocent.

“I have the honour to be, &c.”

The same transaction, with another far more dreadful murder, in which there was a deliberate ingenuity of cruelty which almost exceeds belief, but of which I will spare my readers the recital, is related, with scarcely any variation as to circumstances, by the Advocate-general, who, as well as the gentleman of whose estate the criminal was the manager, and who was at the time absent, expressed their most lively indignation against such horrid cruelty. It may be proper to remark, that the story of the poor boy strikingly shews that such protection as the Negro slave occasionally receives from the laws, is too often to be ascribed rather to the master's care of his property, than to any more generous motive. The master, in this case, when he had only reason to believe that a Negro had been killed and buried out of the way, and not that it was his own slave, goes away satisfied. Is there a human being who in this country would have so done? Again, it is a suggestion which the circumstances of the story enforce on us, that the crowd which was now collected, instead of being shocked at such barbarity, were rather abettors of it; and then we hear the White savages (as the Attorney-general justly styles them) order the Negroes who were present to dig a grave for their wretched countryman. They knew their state too well to refuse; and accordingly, with a promptitude of obedience which, with all our ideas of their sunk and prostrate spirits, must surprise us, they immediately executed the order.

I should be glad to be able to refer the conduct of the assembly, in this instance, altogether to the influence of the lower orders over their minds. This, doubtless, we may hope, had some share in producing the effect ; though, considering that in their circumstances it was peculiarly their duty to set the tone of public judgment and feeling to the bulk of the community, this would not be a very creditable plea. But it is due to truth to remark, that there is no hint to this effect in the papers laid before the House of Commons : on the contrary, in the Assembly's answer, there is an expression of resentment against the Governor, and an intimation of the danger of interfering between master and slave.

This incident will exhibit to every considerate reader a striking specimen of the state of the public mind in the West Indies, at least so recently as 1805, in regard to the African race : and it may serve in some degree to shew the error into which we should fall, by conceiving that the bulk of the White population in our colonies, in estimating the proper conduct to be observed towards the slaves, would think and feel like ourselves. Even in this land of liberty and humanity, acts of atrocious cruelty have been perpetrated. We have heard of an apprentice being starved to death by her mistress ; and, more recently, the British Governor of an African settlement caused the death of a soldier by excessive punishment. But what was the effect on the public mind ? In both cases, it was difficult to prevent the populace from anticipating the execution of the sentence of the law. In Barbadoes, on the contrary, the proposal to punish such enormities by more than a small fine, was just as unpopular as it would be in this country, to inflict a punishment which should be utterly disproportionate to the crime—such as hanging a man for petty larceny. Except among the highest and best educated classes, the natural sympathy was reversed ; and the most horrible murders, some of them attended with circumstances too shocking for recital, instead of exciting any just commiseration for the Negro race, had actually worked in the

opposite direction. And is it to assemblies subject to the influence of such popular prejudices as these, and sitting in the bosom of such communities, that we can commit the temporal and eternal interests of many hundred thousands of these despised fellow-creatures ?

If this case itself suggests to us a useful distrust of the colonial assemblies, in what relates to the Negroes, the sequel of it will not perhaps be less useful in enabling us to judge of their probable conduct, even when they may profess a disposition to conform to our wishes. Whether it was that the influence of the higher members of the Barbadoes community worked at last upon the minds of the Assembly, or that the effect likely to be produced in the English Parliament led to a change of conduct, so it was that the Assembly ultimately gave way ; and it was supposed, that by the new law of Barbadoes, no less than by that of the other islands, the wilful murder of a slave was made a capital offence. Such, indeed, was the statement made afterwards by more than one advocate for the West Indians, in the controversy in 1816, concerning the Registry Bill ; and the Abolitionists were reproached with having referred to a period when the law had been different, as if it had been of an antiquated date. Yet, when the statute book itself was examined, (which, I confess, not doubting the accuracy of the statement, I did not look into for several years), it was found that the alleged reformation of the law is highly problematical at least, if not clearly and totally evasive ; for, instead of simply declaring the well-defined crime of wilful murder to be a capital felony when perpetrated on a slave, the enacting words are ; “ If any person shall hereafter wilfully, *maliciously, wantonly*, and WITHOUT PROVOCATION, kill and murder any slave, &c.” If, hereafter, any of those “ *White Savages*,” so justly termed such by the Attorney-general of Barbadoes, in wreaking their vengeance on the wretched subjects of their tyranny, should actually murder any of their slaves, or the slaves of others, would there be a

hope, even if all the scarcely superable obstacles arising from the absolute rejection of Negro testimony were to be overcome, of a conviction under the terms of this act? What offender could be unable to prove, to the satisfaction of a Barbadoes jury, that there had been *some provocation*? Yet this is the amended, the ameliorating law passed in April, 1805, entitled, “An Act for the *better Protection* of the Slaves of this Island *.”

Surely, with these and the many other evidences we have had of the state of mind respecting Negroes, which prevails in the Colonies, we should be more culpable than they, if we were still to commit implicitly to their legislatures the task of devising and carrying into execution such physical and moral reforms as humanity demands in the slavery of the West Indies. More culpable, I say it advisedly; for, though it is no praise to us, but to the good providence of God, we are exempt from the influence of the harsh prejudices to which they, in some degree by our concurrent fault, have been subjected.

The information also which we now possess, as to the African character, would aggravate our criminality. For though the day, I trust, is gone by for ever, in which the alleged inferiority of intellect and incurable barbarity of the African race were supposed to extenuate their oppression, yet it ought not to be left unnoticed, that the notions which formerly prevailed to their prejudice, in these respects, have of late years been abundantly refuted, not only by authority but experience. It may be confidently affirmed, that there never was any uncivilized people of whose dispositions we have received a more amiable character than that which is given of the Native Africans by Parke and Golberry, both of whom visited those districts of Africa from which victims for the Slave Trade were furnished;

* See papers entitled Colonial Laws respecting Slaves, 1786—1815, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 5th April, 1816.

and whose testimony in their favour will naturally be admitted with less reserve, because neither of them could be biassed by any wish to discountenance the Slave Trade, they having evidently felt no desire for its abolition.

But it is at Sierra Leone, that long despised and calumniated colony, that the African character has been most effectually and experimentally vindicated. The first seeds of civilization which were sown there by the Christian philanthropy of Mr. Granville Sharpe nearly perished from the unkindly soil to which they had been committed; but they were saved from early destruction, and cultured at length successfully, under the fostering care and indefatigable attention of the late excellent Mr. H. Thornton, and by other good and able men, who, both at home and in the colony, co-operated with him; by one living benefactor especially, who will be hereafter venerated as the steady, enlightened, and unwearied, though unostentatious friend of Africa. It is at Sierra Leone that the great experiment on human nature has been tried; and there it has appeared, that the poor African barbarians, just rescued from the holds of slave-ships, are capable, not merely of being civilized, but of soon enjoying, with advantage, the rights and institutions of British freemen. In truth, to have formed any conclusions against the Negroes from the experience we had of them in their state of bondage, was not less unphilosophical than unjust. It was remarked by M. Dupuis, the British consul at Mogadore, that even the generality of European Christians, after a long captivity and severe treatment among the Arabs, appeared at first exceedingly stupid and insensible. "If," he adds, "they have been any considerable time in slavery, they appear lost to reason and feeling; their spirits broken, and their faculties sunk in a species of stupor which I am unable adequately to describe. They appear degraded even below the Negro slave. The succession of hardships, without any protecting law to which they can appeal for any alleviation or redress, seems to destroy every spring of exertion or hope in their minds.

'They appear indifferent to every thing around them ; abject, servile, and brutish *.'

If the native intelligence and buoyant independence of Britons cannot survive in the dank and baleful climate of personal slavery, could it be reasonably expected that the poor Africans, unsupported by any consciousness of personal dignity or civil rights, should not yield to the malignant influences to which they had so long been subjected, and be depressed even below the level of the human species ? But at Sierra Leone, they have resumed the stature and port of men, and have acquired, in an eminent degree, the virtues of the citizen and the subject. Witness the peace, and order, and loyalty which have generally prevailed in this colony, in a remarkable degree ; especially under the present excellent Governor, Sir Charles MacCarthy. Still more, these recent savages, having become the subjects of religious and moral culture, have manifested the greatest willingness to receive instruction, and made a practical proficiency in Christianity, such as might put Europeans to the blush. Not only have they learned with facility the principles of the Christian faith, but they have shewn, by their mutual kindnesses, and by the attachment and gratitude to their worthy pastors and superintendents, that they have derived from their knowledge of Christianity its moral and practical fruits.

The same testimony as to the progress of the Negro children, in common school learning, has been given by all the masters who have instructed them in the island of Hayti ; and the missionaries, in our different West-Indian islands, testify, with one consent, the gratitude and attachment which the West-Indian, no less than the Sierra Leone Negroes feel to those who condescend to become their teachers.

Again ; the impression so assiduously attempted heretofore to be made, that the *indolence* of the Negro race was utterly incurable, and that without the driving whip they

* See Quarterly Review for January 7, 1816.—Article, *Tombuctou*.

never would willingly engage in agricultural labour, has been shewn to be utterly without foundation. Mr. Parke relates, that the Africans, when prompted by any adequate motives, would work diligently and perseveringly both in agricultural and manufacturing labours. And there is on the African coast a whole nation of the most muscular men and the hardiest labourers, who, from their known industry, are hired both for government service, and by the European traders, as workmen, both on ship-board and on shore.

Nor have instances of a similar kind been wanting even in the West Indies, whenever circumstances have been at all favourable to voluntary industry. Since the dissolution of the Black corps, (a measure which the Abolitionists are scarcely, I fear, excusable for not having opposed, though prompted to acquiesce in it by unwillingness to thwart, when not indispensably necessary, the prejudices of the colonists,) many of the disbanded soldiers have maintained themselves by their own agricultural labours, and have manifested a degree of industry that ought to have silenced for ever all imputations on the diligence of their race. But another still more striking instance has been lately afforded in Trinidad. There many hundreds of American Negroes, at the close of the late unhappy war with the United States, were, by the humane policy of Sir Ralph Woodford, received into Trinidad, to the no small alarm of the planters. These were slaves enfranchised by desertion; yet, instead of becoming a nuisance to the community by idleness and dissolute manners, as prejudice loudly foretold, they have maintained themselves well, in various ways, by their own industry and prudence. Many of them have worked as hired labourers for the planters with so much diligence and good conduct, that they are now universally regarded as a valuable acquisition to the colony: and it is supposed, that a large addition to their number would be gladly received.

Are all these important lessons to be read to us without producing any influence on our minds? Ought they not to

enforce on us, as by a voice from Heaven, that we have been most cruelly and inexcusably degrading, to the level of brutes, those whom the Almighty had made capable of enjoying our own civil blessings in this world, not less clearly than he has fitted them to be heirs of our common immortality?

But while we are loudly called on by justice and humanity to take measures without delay for improving the condition of our West-Indian Slaves, self-interest also inculcates the same duty, and with full as clear a voice. It is a great though common error, that notwithstanding we must, on religious and moral grounds, condemn the West-Indian system, yet that, in a worldly view, it has been eminently gainful both to individuals and to the community at large. On the contrary, I believe it might be proved to any inquiring and unprejudiced mind, that, taking in all considerations of political economy, and looking to the lamentable waste of human life among our soldiers and seamen, raised and recruited at a great expense, as well as to the more direct pecuniary charge of protecting the sugar colonies, no system of civil polity was ever maintained at a greater price, or was less truly profitable either to individuals or to the community, than that of our West-Indian settlements. Indeed, it would have been a strange exception to all those established principles which Divine Providence has ordained for the moral benefit of the world, if national and personal prosperity were generally and permanently to be found to arise from injustice and oppression. There may be individual instances of great fortunes amassed by every species of wrong-doing. A course, ruinous in the long run, may, to an individual, or for a time, appear eminently profitable; nevertheless, it is unquestionably true, that the path of prosperity rarely diverges long and widely from that of integrity and virtue,—or, to express it in a familiar adage, that honesty is the best policy.

It ought not to be necessary to assert such principles as these in an age in which it has been incontrovertibly established by the soundest of our political economists,—that

the base and selfish, though plausible views, which formerly prevailed so widely among statesmen, and taught them to believe that the prosperity and elevation of their country would be best promoted by the impoverishment and depression of its neighbours, were quite fallacious; and when we have now learned the opposite and beneficent lesson, —that every nation is, in fact, benefited by the growing affluence of others, and that all are thus interested in the well-being and improvement of all. At such an enlightened period as this, when commerce herself adopts the principles of true morality, and becomes liberal and benevolent, will it be believed that the Almighty has rendered the depression and misery of the cultivators of the soil in our West-Indian colonies necessary, or even conducive, to their prosperity and safety? No, surely! The oppression of these injured fellow-creatures, however it may be profitable in a few instances, can never be generally politic; and in the main, and ultimately, the comfort of the labourer, and the well-being of those who have to enjoy the fruits of his labour, will be found to be coincident.

As for the apprehensions of ruin, expressed by the West Indians, from the instruction and moral improvement of their slaves, or from the interference of the Imperial Legislature, we have been taught by experience in the Slave-Trade controversy, that their apprehensions are not always reasonable, either in degree, or in the objects to which they are directed. How confidently did all the Slave-traders predict their own ruin, together with that of the West Indies, and also of the town of Liverpool, from the regulations of the bill for limiting the number of slaves to be taken in ships of given dimensions, while the trade should be tolerated, and for requiring certain particulars of food and medical attendance! yet, after a few years, the regulations were allowed, not merely to be harmless, but to have been positively and greatly beneficial. The total ruin of the sugar colonies was still more confidently foretold by the planters, the assemblies, and their agents, by their parliamentary advocates, and the West-Indian committee, as

a sure consequence of abolishing the Slave Trade ; and yet there is not, I believe, an intelligent West-Indian who will not now confess, that it would have been greatly for the benefit of all our old colonies, if the Slave Trade had been abolished many years sooner ; and that, if it had continued some years longer, it must have completed their destruction.

Mr. Dundas, in 1792, did not hesitate to ridicule the vain terrors of the parties whose battle he was fighting, and, by their own selection, as their commander-in-chief, though emancipation itself was the object. In illustration of the apprehensions which many entertained of the consequences of changing their slaves into free labourers, he stated that some years before, in certain districts of Scotland, the persons who laboured in the salt-works and coal-mines were actually slaves ; and that a proposal being made to emancipate them, instantly the owners of the works came forward, declaring that if their vassals were to be raised to the condition of free labourers, they themselves would be utterly ruined,—for that such was the peculiarity, such the unpleasant nature, of those species of labours, that they could not depend on hired service, as in other instances. “ But at length,” added Mr. Dundas, “ the good sense of the age obtained the victory. The salters and colliers were changed into free labourers, and all the terrors of the owners ended in smoke.”

While thus alive to imaginary dangers, or rather while thus assiduous in endeavouring to inspire alarm in the mother country, to prevent her listening to the claims of justice and mercy, our planters appear blind to the new and real dangers that are accumulating around them. Providence graciously seems to allow them a golden interval, which, duly improved, might prevent the dreadful explosion that may otherwise be expected. But they neglect it with a supineness and insensibility resembling infatuation. With a community of nearly 800,000 free Blacks, many of them accustomed to the use of arms, within sight of the greatest of our West-Indian islands ; with a slave population in Cuba

and Port Rico, which has been of late so fearfully augmented with imported Africans, as, according to all received principles, to produce, even in pacific times, and much more in the present æra of transatlantic convulsions, the utmost extremity of danger ; with the example afforded in many of the United States, and in almost all the new Republics of South America, where Negro Slavery has been recently abolished,—is this a time, are these the circumstances, in which it can be wise and safe, if it were even honest and humane, to keep down in their present state of heathenish and almost brutish degradation, the 800,000 Negroes in our West-Indian colonies? Here, indeed, is danger, if we observe the signs of the times, whether we take our lesson from the history of men, or form our conclusions from natural reason or from the revealed will of God.

But to raise these poor creatures from their depressed condition, and, if they are not yet fit for the enjoyment of British freedom, elevate them at least from the level of the brute creation into that of rational nature—dismiss the driving whip, and thereby afford place for the development of the first rudiments of civil character—implant in them the principle of hope—let free scope be given for their industry, and for their rising in life by their personal good conduct—give them an interest in defending the community to which they belong—teach them that lesson which Christianity can alone truly inculcate, that the present life is but a short and uncertain span, to which will succeed an eternal existence of happiness or misery—inculcate on them, on the authority of the sacred page, that the point of real importance is not what is the rank or the station men occupy, but how they discharge the duties of life—how they use the opportunities they may enjoy of providing for their everlasting happiness. Taught by Christianity, they will sustain with patience the sufferings of their actual lot, while the same instructress will rapidly prepare them for a better ; and instead of being objects at one time of contempt, and at another of terror, (a base and servile passion, which too

naturally degenerates into hatred,) they will be soon regarded as a grateful peasantry, the strength of the communities in which they live,—of which they have hitherto been the weakness and the terror, sometimes the mischief and the scourge.

To the real nature of the West-Indian system, and still more to the extent of its manifold abuses, the bulk even of well-informed men in this country are, I believe, generally strangers. May it not be from our having sinned in ignorance that we have so long been spared? But ignorance of a duty which we have had abundant means of knowing to be such, can by no one be deemed excusable. Let us not presume too far on the forbearance of the Almighty. Favoured in an equal degree with Christian light, with civil freedom, and with a greater measure of national blessings than perhaps any other country upon earth ever before enjoyed, what a return would it be for the goodness of the Almighty, if we were to continue to keep the descendants of the Africans, whom we have ourselves wrongfully planted in the western hemisphere, in their present state of unexampled darkness and degradation!

While efforts are making to rescue our country from this guilt and this reproach, let every one remember that he is answerable for any measure of assistance which Providence has enabled him to render towards the accomplishment of the good work. In a country in which the popular voice has a powerful and constitutional influence on the government and legislation, to be silent when there is a question of reforming abuses repugnant to justice and humanity is to share their guilt. Power always implies responsibility; and the possessor of it cannot innocently be neutral, when by his exertion moral good may be promoted, or evil lessened or removed.

If I may presume to employ a few words on what belongs more particularly to the writer of these lines, I can truly declare, that an irresistible conviction that it is his positive duty to endeavour to rouse his countrymen to a just sense of the importance and urgency of our duties

towards the Negro Slaves, has alone compelled him reluctantly thus to come forward again in such an arduous cause as this, and at a period of life when nature shrinks from a laborious contest. He can but too surely anticipate from experience, that the grossest and most unfounded calumnies will be profusely poured out against him ; but he nevertheless proceeds, animated by the wish, and, he will add, the confident hope, that the cause of our African brethren will deeply interest the public mind, and that the legislature will be induced to adopt the course prescribed to us by the strongest obligations of moral and religious duty.

Before I conclude, may I presume to interpose a word of caution to my fellow-labourers in this great cause,—a caution which I can truly say I have ever wished myself to keep in remembrance, and observe in practice : it is, that while we expose and condemn the evils of the system itself, we should treat with candour and tenderness the characters of the West-Indian proprietors. Let not the friends of the Africans forget that they themselves might have inherited West-Indian property ; and that, by early example and habit, they might have been subjected to the very prejudices which they now condemn. I have before declared, and I now willingly repeat, that I sincerely believe many of the owners of West-Indian estates to be men of more than common kindness and liberality ; but I myself have found many of them, as I have had every reason to believe, utterly unacquainted with the true nature and practical character of the system with which they have the misfortune to be connected.

While, however, we speak and act towards the colonists personally with fair consideration and becoming candour, let our exertions in the cause of the unfortunate slaves be zealous and unremitting. Let us act with energy suited to the importance of the interests for which we contend. Justice, humanity, and sound policy prescribe our course, and will animate our efforts. Stimulated by a consciousness

of what we owe to the laws of God and the rights and happiness of man, our exertions will be ardent, and our perseverance invincible. Our ultimate success is sure; and ere long we shall rejoice in the consciousness of having delivered our country from the greatest of her crimes, and rescued her character from the deepest stain of dishonour.

THE END.